

This House has a chance to correct that, to reverse course, to honor our Nation's veterans and to recognize their service, their sacrifice, and their patriotism. We can correct the harmful reconciliation instruction to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and we can restore these cuts by supporting the motion to instruct conferees that will be offered later today by our colleague, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT).

Quite frankly, we should be increasing, rather than cutting, health and other benefits to our veterans. Let us not turn our back on our veterans. We should instead salute them.

Vote for the Spratt motion to instruct conferees today when it comes to the floor. Vote to honor our veterans, and vote for a better budget.

PRESERVING THE DIGNITY OF OUR NATION'S VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the gentlewoman from Indiana (Ms. CARSON) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Ms. CARSON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I know there is a hard and fast rule that we cannot refer to someone in the other body, but since this person is no longer a Member of the United States Senate, let me dedicate my remarks to the Honorable Max Cleland, who became a triple amputee in the Vietnam War and who is no longer in service in the United States Senate.

I rise today to speak about the dignity of our Nation's veterans. Last week, Mr. Speaker, we offered and passed a resolution asking for the country to pray and to fast. I did not realize that at that time, according to what I am told, many of our troops in harm's way were down to one meal a day. I did not realize at the time that it was them that we were asking to fast.

As General Omar Bradley once stated, "We are dealing with veterans, not with procedures. We are dealing with their problems, and not ours."

I have a constituent who served his country in Vietnam, Mr. Bob Creasy. He was exposed to Agent Orange, the defoliant used to fight the war. Mr. Creasy did not realize at the time how deadly and poisonous the chemical was. Actually, none of us did. Many years later he experienced symptoms and illnesses that can now be validated and linked to his exposure to Agent Orange.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs claims that Bob is not eligible for compensation because he did not come forward when the symptoms first occurred. The symptoms, however, were not recognized as being caused by Agent Orange until very recently.

Why can we not validate the disability and compensate accordingly at this time? Is it that the Veterans' Administration is very restricted and limited in resources and will escape obligations any way and however they can?

What of our brave women and men who served in the first Gulf War? What of the Gulf War Syndrome? We are sending hundreds of thousands of young women and men into harm's way at this very moment, and at the same time we are cutting benefits for those who served in previous wars.

My observation, Mr. Speaker, is not extracted from a comic book. My name is JULIA CARSON, married to Sam Carson, a veteran of the Korean conflict, United States Marine Corps, who is now 100 percent service-connected disabled. My son, Sam Carson, United States Marine, served his country well, fortunately during peacetime.

It is not that I do not understand the plight of veterans, Mr. Speaker; I know the plight of veterans. There are over 25 million veterans in this great Nation of ours, and in Indiana alone there are 562,000. Are we supposed to tell them after serving in the military, defending our country, preserving our freedom, that the services that they need are unavailable in order to pay for a tax cut?

I heard another rumor emanating from the administration about "shared sacrifices." I suppose those "shared sacrifices" are relegated to the haves and the have-evens. To pass a budget that cuts mandatory spending from the President's budget by \$15 billion is unconscionable. Even that budget was \$3 billion too low to fully fund the needs of those who have served this country so ably.

As our distinguished ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) recently stated, "Our Nation must not require those who serve in uniform to bear the financial costs of their service-connected disabilities."

Give me a break. A tax break for those who need no tax break, who earned their wealth off of the United States of America, and now we are asking them to take more; and we give less to the people who are responsible for our well-being, for the most part, the veterans of this Nation?

There is no excuse to delay the needed medical care for our veterans. We need to show them with deeds and not with words that, regardless of their mission, we support their dedication to their jobs and that we are for them in their time of need.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, I recited the words of the first President of the United States, George Washington, whose words are worth repeating at this time:

"The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their country."

Mr. Speaker, we must not fail our veterans.

OPPOSING PROPOSED CUTS IN VETERAN PROGRAMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GRIJALVA) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise today to add my comments to the chorus of dismay and opposition to the proposed cuts in veteran programs and benefits that we are currently hearing about in this country proposed by the President and approved by the Republican majority of this House.

Many families in my district have sons and daughters, husbands and wives, family members, that are in the military and in this current conflict that this country finds itself in. Presently I have the responsibility to communicate to some of these families about the death, the serious life-threatening injuries and the missing-in-action status of some of their family members. I relate to them my personal respect, gratitude and sorrow at their anguish and at their sacrifice.

Yet, while I am doing that, I find it unconscionable that while our men and women are fighting overseas, following the orders of their Commander-in-Chief, we at home are reducing the health care benefits that our veterans have earned while risking and giving their lives in the service of this country, in the protection of our freedoms and in the extension of the liberties that we all enjoy.

How can we possibly justify the budget as passed by this House that contains almost \$29 billion in cuts in veterans' programs over a 10 year period, primarily in veterans benefits and health care. What are we going to tell the men and women presently in uniform and their families; that their service is honorable, needed, and respected, but not worth the cost of full benefits for them and their future?

Mr. Speaker, today I would urge all of my colleagues to restore and enhance the benefits and programs that have been earned by our veterans and cut by the President and this Congress. To do otherwise would be an appalling betrayal of America's commitments to our veterans.

At a time of war, let us not be hypocritical. Let us respect and enhance the benefits of our veterans, so as they sacrifice for us, as they follow the orders of their Commander-in-Chief, they will earn not only our respect, but entitlement to benefits and protection of programs that will extend and support their quality of life.

VETERANS CUTS DEPLORED BY VETERAN LEADERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.